



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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June 13, 2006
FB06-027

FINAL RULE FOR A REGULATORY AMENDMENT TO THE REEF FISH MANAGEMENT PLAN TO SET RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR THE GULF OF MEXICO GROUPER SMALL ENTITY COMPLIANCE GUIDE

NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule implementing catch specifications for the recreational grouper fishery, as proposed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. These measures replace interim regulations. The final rule is effective July 15, 2006.

The final rule will:

- establish a bag limit of 1 red grouper per person per day, and
- prohibit for-hire captains and crews from retaining bag limits of any grouper while under charter.

Cumulatively, these measures are expected to reduce recreational red grouper landings by approximately 30 percent, and are needed to return recreational red grouper landings to levels specified in the rebuilding plan.

A recreational closed season for red grouper, gag, and black grouper from February 15 to March 15 each year was also proposed with this rule. However, NOAA Fisheries Service is awaiting a new stock assessment for gag grouper that will contain information pertinent to evaluating the need for the seasonal closure. The stock assessment is expected to be available in July 2006. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries Service will consider implementation of the seasonal closure after the new gag assessment has been completed.

Addresses

The regulatory amendment, which includes a Regulatory Impact Review, Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Social Impact Assessment, and a Fishery Impact Statement, is available from:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, Florida 33607
Phone: 813-348-1630; fax: 813-348-1711
e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org
website: <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>

Written copies of the final rule may be obtained from NOAA Fisheries Service at the above address.

Electronic copies of the final rule may be obtained from the *Federal Register* website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

This bulletin serves as a Small Entity Compliance Guide and complies with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Fairness Enforcement Act of 1996. Any discrepancies between this document and the rule as published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, over 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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FB06-027

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